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Ford Stresses Support Of Intelligence Agencies

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WASHINGTON, April 10—The members of the Senate President Ford made an impassioned appeal to Congress to-night not to allow its investigations of the United States intelligence community to destroy national security or harm the effectiveness of the Central Intelligence Agency.

At one point he departed from his prepared text to issue a deeply personal vote of confidence in the agency. "The C.I.A. was of maximum importance to Presidents before me," he said. "C.I.A. has been of maximum importance to me." The C.I.A. and its associated intelligence organizations could be of maximum importance to some of you in this audience who might be President at some later date.

Strongest Indication

Tonight's speech by the President was the strongest indication to date that he did not plan to accede to every request for data made by Congressional committees looking into the intelligence apparatus.

Then he added: "I think it would be a catastrophic for Congress, or anyone else, to destroy the usefulness by dismantling in effect our intelligence system upon which we rest so heavily."

The President's remarks on the agency drew the loudest applause of any portion of his speech, although the applause seemed to come mainly from the Republican members of both Houses. The extemporaneous portions seemed aimed directly at members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and its chairman, Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho. It was only yesterday that the committee sent a letter to the President asking him to expedite his cooperation.

A highly placed Administration source confirmed that Mr. Ford's remarks reflected the "growing concern" within the White House over the ability of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence to maintain the security of the material it hoped to get from the Central Intelligence Agency and other departments.

"We are understandably nervous about security," the source said, "particularly the procedures for handling documents." He said that the Administration hoped in some instances that the material sought by the committee could be read in its present location and not transferred to the committee.

There were other materials, this source said, that were so sensitive that it might be best for only the chairman and vice chairman of the committee to see them. And the source did not rule out the possibility that there might be documents "so terrible that nobody should see them."

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joint session of Congress, came after he had dealt with Vietnam and economic matters.

In a world where information is power," the President said in his prepared text, "a vital element of our national security lies in our intelligence services. They are as essential to our nation's security in peace as in war."

"Americans can be grateful for the important, but largely unsung, contributions and achievements of the intelligence services of this nation."

"It is entirely proper that this system be subject to Congressional review. But a sensationalized public debate over legitimate intelligence activities is a disservice to this nation and a threat to our intelligence system. It ties our hands while our potential enemies operate with secrecy, skill and vast resources. Any investigation must be conducted with maximum discretion and dispatch, to avoid crippling a vital national institution," he said.

It was at this point that Mr. Ford departed from the text to make his remarks on the C.I.A. "As Congress oversees intelligence activities, it must organize itself to do so in a responsible way. It has been traditional for the executive to consult with the Congress through specially protected procedures that safeguarded essential secrets."

Promises Cooperation

"But recently those procedures have been altered in a way that makes the protection of vital information next to impossible. I will work with the leaders of the House and Senate to devise procedures which will meet the needs of the Congress for review and the needs of the nation for an effective intelligent service."

The system of consultations between the executive and Congress over intelligent matters has been the very system that has come under so much recent criticism. It was a system whereby C.I.A. officials and others with top intelligence responsibilities conducted secret briefings for selected senior members of four separate Congressional committees.

Although there have been few charges of national security matters being leaked as a result of this type of exchange, many in Congress believe that it also deprived them of a way to control the operations of intelligence agencies, moreover there have been repeated charges, with considerable evidence, that Government officials have lied to the Congress